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Authority of the Mother's People

854 According to Godefroy, during the whole of this period and during the next few months the mother's people continue at frequent intervals to 574 invade the father's house, whence they visit the women's lodge in the exercise of their "right of inspection" over the mother and child. In the special case cited by him, when the child, in this case a girl, was about three or four months old the mother took it for a short stay in her parents' village, returning with presents of food.[1]

593 Henceforth "it is the mother's side of the family that exercises all authority over the children. The mother's eldest brother is in fact the 604 legal 'father,'[2] and it is him that the children call *tete*, the word used elsewhere for 'father.'[3] The lack of social respect paid to the real father is shown by the fact that he is actually called by his own children by his personal name, not only in address, but even when his children are speaking of him to others."[4] Thus also "until he is married, a boy regards the family of the mother as his own true family. . . . When the child finds the parental scoldings irksome, he takes refuge with his mother's brother, and may even stay with him several months until his anger cools."[5] The rôle of the mother's brother in this respect is described as one of "guardianship and moderation."[6]

Special Rites with Regard to the Eldest Son

852 In addition to the rites described above there are two special rites connected with the birth and dedication of an eldest son. As in the more aristocratic sections of our own society in which primogeniture is a recognised institution, so also in Vao considerable emphasis is laid on the position of the eldest son. Thus, in the tale dealing with the foundation of the Vao Maki, To-wewe, the founder, was one of ten brothers, of whom he himself was the eldest.[7] The pattern of ten brothers is a common one throughout Malekula, closely associated with the decimal arrangement of upright stones on the Upper Side of the dancing-ground during High Maki and of the corresponding sacrificial stakes during Low Maki. It will be seen later how during High Maki each tenth stone may be furnished with a shrine.[8] In Atchin such an arrangement has been stabilised to the extent that the division of each village into Quarters has disappeared and has been replaced by a division into ten families, each

[1] Godefroy, 1, 1933, pp. 111-12.
[2] This of course only means that he exercises certain rights elsewhere exercised by the father.
[3] But see p. 127. The term of reference for the mother's brother in *soguk*.
[4] Godefroy, ibid. p. 109.
[5] Ibid. p. 111. [6] Ibid. p. 114. [7] See p. 284. [8] See p. 425.

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Mothers' brothers are initiators and give Maki-men their new names.

This "paying for the stones" is, however, not an act of initiation, but one of preparation. The true act of initiation lies in the sacrifice of tusked boars and in the taking of a new name, and here it is the mother's brother from another village who appears as the initiator. For it is to the mother's side of the family, coupled with the figure of the Guardian Ghost, that the sacrifice is made, and the mother's brother himself whom each individual Maki-man "pays for the name" and title that signify his re-birth on the assumption of each new rank.[1]

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Patrilineal versus matrilineal system.

This sharp distinction drawn between the functions of the candidate's patrilineal relatives on the one hand and his matrilineal relatives on the other is a fundamental factor in the ritual of the public graded society all over the North and North Central New Hebrides and the Banks Islands, expressed clearly in Oba by the fact that the candidate's father used to indemnify the members of the candidate's matrilineal moiety by payment of a pig "as an acknowledgment that he was intruding on their province, that the patriarchal was intruding on the matriarchal system."[2]

In the same way, in South Raga it is said by Tattevin to be "*on account of the patrilineal organisation* that the sacrifices made to the ancestral ghosts are given to the mother's brother, and, in his name, to all the members of his family or clan."[3]

In Vao, where kinship is reckoned on a sectional basis, it is, as we have seen, not only the Maki-men's fathers but also their sons who assist them in every way and for this assistance are duly paid. In this case neither assistance nor payment is grudged, since the advancement of each section or "line" of the patrilineal clan redounds to the credit of the other, and the monuments erected by each, together with the jaws of the tusked boars which are sacrificed at them, remain in the common dancing-ground as witness to the combined achievement of the whole patrilocal community.

Very different, however, is the relation between the Maki-men and their mothers' brothers. For these literally do nothing but receive the payment already mentioned for allowing the Maki-men to proceed with the rite and thus to become ritually re-born. Even this act moreover is grudged, for, as will be seen later, at the moment when each of the chief Maki-men is about to sacrifice his tusked boar at the dolmen, he finds his way to the dolmen barred by all his mothers' brothers, who will not let him pass through till he has yet further propitiated them by the gift of a

[1] See p. 391.

[2] Codrington, 3, p. 114.

[3] Tattevin, 1, 1926, p. 380 (my italics). For amplification of this statement, see present volume, pp. 721 ff.

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881 constantly both buying new rites and reselling them to their neighbours, and the process of diffusion is one of continual percolation of marketable rites from one island or village to another. The same process has occurred over the three-mile stretch of water separating Atchin from Vao, so that the acquired rites on Vao, that is to say those which are omitted when "branching out," represent the small ripples lapping a distant shore sent out by a more violent diffusional movement first appearing with great *éclat* some eight generations ago on the Malekulan shore at the two coastal villages of Lawor and Bot-walim, passing first to the now extinct coastal villages, then to the island of Wala, thence to the south-east villages on Atchin, from them still moving to the north-western villages on Atchin, and thence trickling over to Vao, where the new rites are of such recent introduction that there is but little differentiation between the use in the different villages, and the rite may be taken as being approximately uniform throughout the island.

Beating the Mothers' Brothers

881 604 One further fact needs mention before we come to the details of initiation on Vao. This is the remarkable custom of beating the novices' mothers' brothers when they come to inspect the boys immediately after the operation.[1] This custom is carried out with extraordinary severity on Atchin, where I have myself witnessed it and where the mothers' brothers are often really severely hurt. It is not done so severely on Vao, which is one of the reasons given for the fact that the initiation rite on Vao is also called "good initiation" (Vao *bagho ru*; Atchin *baho res*), another reason being the absence of other violent features of initiation performed on Atchin such as the seven-day period of stealing to be described in a future volume.

Nevertheless, even on Vao where the mother's brother is held in high respect the custom is observed in a modified form. On enquiring into the reason for this it is necessary to make a brief survey of the position of the mother's brother in the initiation rites of neighbouring peoples. This shows that, though in the New Hebrides generally the geographical distribution of incision coincides with the area of overt patrilineal descent, the right to have the operation performed is everywhere bought from the mother's brother. Moreover, in most parts of the group except in the Small Islands, North Malekula and South Raga, the mother's brother plays an important and often pre-eminent part in the rite. Thus, while in most places the actual operation is performed, as in the Small Islands, by any sufficiently skilled person, in Seniang, according to Deacon, this rôle is taken by the mother's brother.[2] This recalls the practice in the not very distant Polynesian island of Tikopia where in cases of illegitimacy

[1] See p. 508.

[2] Deacon, 4, p. 246.

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the operation performed by the mother's brother appears to be regarded as "a kind of legitimation." [1] In Fiji also the mother's brother takes a leading part in the rite,[2] and, returning to the North Central New Hebrides, in the Sulol district of Ambrim the mother's brother holds the novice during the operation, applies the first dressing, and carries the boy from the reef where the operation is performed to the Lodge where he undergoes his period of seclusion.[3]

Even so far north as Lambumbu in West Malekula the father, though making all arrangements for the operation, and choosing the novice's tutor, is not supposed to have anything to do with his son during the preparatory period, and during the ten-day period of seclusion before the operation itself "the only man that a lad may see besides his guardian is his mother's brother; his father would not think of visiting him, nor even of going near the place of seclusion." [4] In this case, though the mother's brother does not perform the operation, he still acts as a kind of godfather to the boy. It is to be noted that this preparatory period represents that part of the dual rite mentioned on p. 485 which belongs to the older and simpler incision rite before the introduction of the hoaxes and the thirty-day period of seclusion, and the Initiation Lodge is still called by the old term *na-amel na-av-avien*. In South Raga, on the other hand, it is the father who holds the novice during the operation and who subsequently tends his wound.[5]

The conflict between the mother's brother and the father is already well advanced, even in South-West and West Malekula. Thus in Seniang, immediately after the operation and before the payment to the mother's brother, a mock fight takes place between this relative and the father. "Each man gathers his friends about him and they range on opposite sides of the dancing-ground, facing each other. The father and the mother's brother now step forward, each armed with a stick. . . . With these the two men belabour each other, so severely that often blood flows." One of the reasons put forward by the natives for this is that "the uncle is angry with the father for making his nephew's penis sore." Deacon's posthumous editor is unable to explain this, as according to his account it is the mother's brother himself who in this district performs the operation. Internal evidence shows, however, that his notes regarding the initiation rites of various neighbouring tribes have become slightly confused.[6] As a problem concerning the whole district, however, the meaning of the phrase is clear, namely that, owing to the

[1] Rivers, 1, vol. I, p. 311.
[2] Ibid., 2, p. 231, and Rivers, 3.
[3] Ibid., 1, vol. I, p. 292.
[4] Deacon, 4, p. 251.
[5] Tattevin, 1, 1926, p. 401.
[6] For instance, my account (Layard, 2) of initiation in Seniang, the notes of which were among those given to him to copy out before he went to Malekula, have been incorporated in his posthumous book (Deacon, 4) as part of the rites performed in Lambumbu.

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prevailing patrilineal influence, the father has here usurped the mother's brother's function with regard to the operation. A similar case reported by myself from Seniang but included in Deacon's book under the rites carried out in Lambumbu shows the increasingly inferior position in which the mother's brother finds himself. This is a scene in which, during the payment by all novices to their mothers' brothers after the operation, one particular mother's brother chosen for his qualities as a great fighter, on receiving his pig, stalks fiercely towards the boy and, seizing the spear which the boy holds as symbol of the pig, digs it into the ground so that it bends and breaks. Then he turns to all those assembled and addresses them furiously: "You see how I take this spear, and break it. This shows you my power, that I break this spear and you dare not touch me. Just so, if presently this boy dies through your fault, will I come and kill that man who let him die." [1] This speech incorporated into the ritual of initiation shows clearly the thwarted position in which the mothers' brothers find themselves owing to the control of initiation having passed out of their hands into those of the novices' paternal kin.

It would appear from this that, far from incision being originally a patrilineal institution, as would at first sight seem to be from its geographical distribution,[2] it is in fact a matrilineal trait [3] in which the function of the mother's brother has, in North Malekula and South Raga, been taken over by the boy's patrilineal kin, though the mother's brother continues to exact payment as in all childhood *rites de passage*. In the Small Islands, though excluded from all active share in the boy's initiation, the mother's brother still preserves the right of inspection after the operation, but the fury of the boy's patrilineal kinsmen at the tribute they are still through age-long tradition powerless to withhold vents itself in the severe beating he receives when he does so. This beating is of a type quite different from that meted out to the novices and their tutors, but, like them and unlike the mothers' brothers in Lambumbu, his inferior position is here so completely accepted that he puts up no defence.

The fact that the beating of the boys' mothers' brothers is so much more severe on Atchin than it is on Vao is clearly due to the much greater hold that patrilineal institutions have gained there than on this island. In both islands, however, as in all initiation rites throughout the group, once the whole initiation rite is over, his fundamental connexion with the rite is recognised in the form of shooting expeditions which the novices undertake to their respective mothers' brothers' villages.

Yet another indication of the originally matrilineal character of incision is the tale of origin told at Matanavat on the extreme north coast

[1] See last footnote.
[2] Deacon, 4, pp. 703-6, indeed places it among the patrilineal features.
[3] Since writing this I have found that Rivers also had come to a similar conclusion. See Rivers, 2.

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of Malekula, which retains many early matrilineal features. For, whereas in the Small Islands it is the younger of two brothers who is said to have discovered the operation by accidentally cutting himself with a bamboo,[1] in Matanavat the two persons concerned were a man and his sister who, climbing a bread-fruit tree to cut down the ripe fruit, let fall her bamboo knife so that it accidentally cut the man's foreskin.[2]

With these preliminary explanations, it is now possible to proceed with a description of the rites as they are practised on Vao.

Relation between Novices and their Tutors. Threats of Homosexual Action on the Part of Ghosts

I have already referred to the terminology in use throughout North Malekula and the Small Islands between novices and their tutors. In Vao novices and all those not previously initiated are called *mov ghal*. In contrast to these, all initiated persons are called *to-mbat*, a term which has been fully discussed on pp. 492 ff. Each novice has a special *to-mbat* detailed to look after him, to tell him what he must do, to tend his wound and share his beatings. This man, usually a lodge-brother, I propose to refer to as the novice's tutor. Between these two a special relationship exists, which at first sight would appear to indicate the same homosexual relationship as obtains between novice and tutor among the Big Nambas. Thus, in the ritual terminology of Vao the tutor is said to be "married" (*e lagi ni*) to the novice, who refers to him sometimes as *teme natuk*, one of the terms used by a wife for her husband. Older initiates not acting as tutors are referred to as "unmarried" *to-mbat*.

It was, however, repeatedly denied by the Small Islanders that this terminology implied actual homosexual connexion between tutor and novice, and, being usually lodge-brothers, there is here no possibility of the two belonging to intermarrying kinship sections such as would appear to be indicated by the more specialised terminology in use between men and their boy-lovers among the Big Nambas. Indeed, so far as I could learn, though homosexuality is not unknown in the Small Islands, it is rare, and such relationships as exist almost always consist in a Small Island boy being the passive partner in a temporary union with an adult native from the Malekulan mainland, for which he is rewarded by the present of a money-mat in the same way as men throughout the group make such gifts to their girl-lovers. The Small Islanders' attitude towards such relationships are a comic look and the remark, "What a waste of time when there are so many women." On Atchin, more closely connected with the customs of the Malekulan mainland, the tutor actually addresses his novice as "my wife." Even there, however,

[1] See p. 496. [2] Harrisson, 2, pp. 48-9.